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WASHINGTON, DC- U.S. Rep. Charlie Melancon made the following statement today following House passage of a measure instructing conference committee members negotiating the final Water Resource Development Act of 2006 "to agree to provisions that will provide protection to communities located in the coastal area of Louisiana and Mississippi from the storm surge of a category five hurricane."

"Today for the first time in history, the U.S. House of Representatives has spoken in tremendous support for category five hurricane protection for the people and industries on our Gulf Coast," said Melancon. "Today was also the first chance since Hurricanes Katrina and Rita that we in the House have had the chance to publicly weigh in on final WRDA negotiations, and I am proud that our first action was to address the need for a stronger hurricane protection system. I am also proud that our entire Louisiana delegation voted in favor of the measure.

"Had the motion failed to pass, the defeat would have hindered Louisiana's battle for category five hurricane protection. Because the measure passed with overwhelming support, the Army Corps of Engineers now has the full backing of the U.S. House of Representatives for building a category five hurricane protection system. This motion to instruct sets a good precedent for future negotiations, adding momentum to our cause as the WRDA conferees prepare to meet."

Last night, Melancon managed the floor debate for the motion and delivered the following comments:

"Mr. Speaker,

"I come here today in support of building a comprehensive hurricane protection system for the Gulf Coast. For years, we in Congress have focused on various wants for our constituents. Today, we have the opportunity to focus on our nation's needs."

"Earlier this year I introduced in Congress the Meeting Authorization Requirements for Our Coast, or MARC, Act. This legislation would have authorized a comprehensive hurricane protection system for the Gulf Coast. Today's motion is a continuation of that effort.

"Building a hurricane protection system that can protect our coastal citizens and businesses from category five hurricanes is the most important need in the Gulf Coast states. In Louisiana, there are currently over 200,000 people that have NO protection - ZERO - from the next deadly hurricane. If Hurricane Katrina had hit Louisiana just a few miles to the west, the devastation would have been like nothing you saw on television. Building a category five hurricane protection system will save lives.

"But a comprehensive hurricane protection system is also VITAL to supporting and safeguarding our nation's energy supply. Louisiana has a long and distinguished history of oil and gas production, both onshore and offshore. Among the 50 states, we are FIRST in crude oil production, second in natural gas production, and second in total energy production. Currently, approximately 34% of the nation's natural gas supply and almost 30% of the nation's crude oil supply is either produced in Louisiana, produced offshore Louisiana, or moves through the state and its coastal wetlands. Together with the infrastructure in the rest of the state, this production is connected to nearly 50% of the total refining capacity in the United States.

"Based on its energy producing value to the nation, acre for acre, Louisiana is the most valuable real-estate in the nation. Louisiana has 17 petroleum refineries, most of them large, world-scale facilities. These refineries have a combined crude oil distillation capacity of approximately 2.77 million barrels per calendar day, which is 16.2% of total U.S. refinery capacity of 17.1 million barrels per day, the second highest in the nation. Two of the four Strategic Petroleum Reserve storage facilities are also in Louisiana. Just last week, Chevron announced it had discovered a deepwater oil and gas field off Louisiana's coast that could account for as much as 50% of our nation's known reserves. This field will be largely serviced by Louisiana ports - ports that remain highly vulnerable to hurricanes.

"Louisiana is a crucial part of America's "energy coast," and we need help.

"Supporting our nation's energy needs has come at a price. In the past century, Louisiana

has lost 1.2 million acres of coastal wetlands and barrier islands, and stands to lose hundreds of thousands more if measures to stop the loss aren't taken. That's a football field of land every 38 minutes. Our coast is literally vanishing before our eyes.

"Without this protective buffer, Louisiana's people, businesses, and energy infrastructure are much more vulnerable to storm surges and other hurricane-related flooding."

"Comprehensive hurricane protection combined with coastal restoration will offer truly adequate hurricane protection necessary to protect the lives of over 2 million residents -- over 50% of the state's population - and the infrastructure that supports our nation's energy needs.

"Some of my colleagues might question the cost of a comprehensive hurricane protection system. In response, I say that you can pay now, or pay a much higher price later. You can pay to build category five protection today, or you can pay later with a disrupted national energy supply, ruined businesses, lives lost, and hundreds of billions of recovery costs to our citizens.

"The Gulf Coast has worked tirelessly and quietly for generations to provide the rest of the nation with the energy and transportation services needed to keep industry around the country on pace. Only now, in its time of need, does the Gulf Coast ask for something back: a category five hurricane protection system to protect lives, property, and energy production from future storms."

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